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What a Carpenter did with his Bible

by

John F. Genung

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WHAT A CARPENTER DID WITH HIS BIBLE

An Address

BY

JOHN FRANKLIN GENUNG

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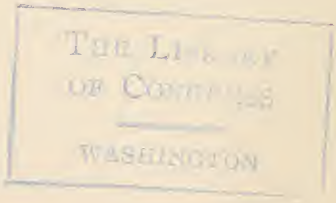

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WHAT A CARPENTER DID WITH HIS BIBLE.

"Is not this the carpenter? From whence hath this man these things?" Such was the astonished inquiry of His life-long neighbors when Jesus of Nazareth opened the scriptures so marvellously in the Galilean synagogue. And when later He stood among the educated Jews in the Temple, interpreting to them the things of God, men asked in equal wonder, "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" An inquiry that leaped so readily to the lips of all who heard Him, acquaintances and strangers, common and cultured alike, may have also its interest for us. Where, then, did Jesus of Nazareth get His knowledge of the Bible?

If we have ever raised the question at all, it is not unlikely we have dismissed it with the vague notion that our Lord's knowledge and use of scripture was something supernatural and mysterious, brought over somehow from His divine pre-exis-

tence, or received through His baptism with the Holy Spirit. But surely, if we look to Him as Example and Elder Brother, living a genuine human life for us to pattern by, a second thought must lead us to revise that idea. For we want Him to live our life with our resources. If we regard Him as true Son of man, we must think of Him as here among us to prove what can be made of man's possibilities, subject to man's limitations. To suppose these latter in any point transcended would be to endow Him with resources beyond our avail, and by just so much to take away the support that we seek from His veritable human heart and mind. Our very dependence on Him makes us slow to do that. In the use of the Bible, therefore, as in other things, we look to Him for guidance and leading: we may reasonably interrogate His life and words to see how a man's powers at their soundest and truest, the powers, not of unapproachable omniscience, but of study and memory and judgment and disciplined meditation, may go to work to get a wholesome knowledge of the things God has revealed through prophet and lawgiver, historian and poet. This we may do without forgetting that He is God manifest in the flesh; nay, is not His Godhead all the more real and wonderful when He sits by our side as a wise, deep-seeing Teacher, showing us by His own example how to search those scriptures in which we

think we have eternal life, and how to find therein the wisdom that is unto salvation?

It is eminently proper then, I think, to look at Jesus as did His neighbors and the cultivated Jews when they made those inquiries; and even while we see much more, to see what they saw in Him. Their questioning seems to presuppose two significant facts about this Teacher of scripture: first, that His teaching, while truly authoritative, had the authority, not of an uncreated voice from heaven precluding all doubt and all answer, but of the sound sense, the reasonableness, the sane insight, the learning, of a gifted human mind reading God's word and will from the human point of view; and secondly, that He who thus taught had no visible advantages beyond the station of a Galilean and an artisan. Such contemporary recognition may well have its weight and its comfort for us. Here is a carpenter using His Bible in a way open to every carpenter and every man; in a way that, whatever more it shows, proves certainly that He has not neglected the opportunities available to His station in life.

I.

Now, I shall want you soon to join with me in a brief study of fact; for this is not a case where we want speculation or theorizing: we are going to see what the carpenter actually did with His

Bible when a supreme occasion came for Him to use it. But before we proceed to this, let us glance a moment at His home life and surroundings to see what His opportunities for Bible study were, and how these were related to His outlook upon life.

Until He was thirty years old, all His life, in fact, except between three and four years, Jesus was a village carpenter working at His trade in a little town not unlike one of our New England country villages, but more compactly built; — a town whose only fame was disrepute for the rudeness and ignorance — to say no worse — of its inhabitants. He belonged thus not to the ranks of the well-read and travelled, not to the wealthy and leisured, but to the artisan class, to those who must by daily labor earn their daily bread, and who when they go home from their work at night are wearied with the wholesome weariness of honest toil. His surroundings were such as are often used as an excuse for ignorance or neglect of the things of the mind; His moments of studious leisure had to be reclaimed from hours of labor and bodily fatigue. But by what He managed to do in His lowly trade He not only honored study; He honored also the artisan class as no other class of men since the world began have been honored. An honest trade is a Christlike thing. Have you ever thought of it? — the greatest man that ever

lived, the man who solved those problems of life which have been the despair of philosophers and scholars, was a mechanic. I like to think of Him as engaged in adding by the work of His hands to the homely comforts and conveniences of His fellow-men, — as building, constructing, bringing something practical to pass.

But you see His life did not all flow through His hands, or become wholly absorbed in artisan skill. He was a well-rounded man, not a mere animated plane or chisel. It is here that many mechanics part company with Him, here that He begins to put life in its true proportions. And so, from that life of lowly labor, there opened constantly windows toward heavenly things; and while He was earning daily bread, He was subsisting on that divine meat and drink which falls to no prince as a luxury, yet which no one is too poor to earn. It did not impair any job of His carpenter work to let His unfettered mind busy itself with the words of Psalmist and prophet; nor was meditation on the sacred histories of old at all uncongenial to His plain and humble village life. It is natural enough to think, as the people of that day thought, that a course of training among the doctors at Jerusalem was necessary to a sound knowledge of scripture; and doubtless many a mechanic nowadays would excuse his neglect of the Bible on such ground. Our Lord's

life shows how much such an excuse is worth, to one who has the will to learn. Here is a mechanic whose university was the work-bench and the village synagogue; and yet He was graduated therefrom with such profound and vital views of scripture truth that even professional theologians were amazed and silenced.

Now, I am not disposed to think His artisan life was wholly a disadvantage to study, or that He could necessarily have done better if, as we say, He had gone to college and moved among learned men. Learned men often cloister themselves in a bookish world of their own, apart from practical and every-day interests, where they weave unsubstantial, sometimes grotesquely unreal, fabrics of thought that have no fruitful relation to any one's actual life. That was one trouble with the scribes of Christ's time. But if we can get a straight-seeing, open-eyed man of affairs, a mechanic or a laboring man or a merchant who knows by experience men's commonest needs and takes hold of life by the practical end, — if we can get such a man to look at the things of God as Jesus did, and report thereon sincerely and in his own idiom, his report will be worth something, it will be adapted to every-day and universal issues. After all, then, Jesus' carpenter shop was no mean school; it kept Him at any rate from educating Himself away from the common mind

and heart. Consider, then, what a door is open to a laboring man with his Bible; what an actual advantage he has, in some ways, over the scholar, if he will take it, as the carpenter of Nazareth did, in the Spirit of God.

In one sense our Lord's resources of study, as compared with ours, were very slender. For, in the first place, His Bible was not so large as ours. All His scripture instruction was received from the Old Testament. Those patriarchal histories and prophetic words on which criticism nowadays is apparently shedding so much darkness had light enough to guide Him; or, rather, they were just beginning to receive as their illumination the mild radiance of His own Messiah life. He was approaching them as a pioneer, furnishing the light by which He read. The cross and the resurrection tomb, which to us are the grand key to all scripture, existed as yet only as a faith and a sublime purpose. Think what your Bible would be with these and their accompanying teachings left out. Then, further, there were no printed books, no newspapers, no universal diffusion of literature. I am not at all sure that Jesus had a Bible even in His home. He may have had to depend on the synagogue scrolls for His copy of the scriptures, and perhaps on the weekly readings in the Sabbath service for His access to them. Yet, slender as in one sense these resources seem, in another

sense they were great. In fact, with the eager, vitalizing mind that He brought to them, the very absence of other resources made these great. We have heard of the *homo unius libri*, the man of one book, and of what power he may have when that book is woven into the tissues of his life and will. Here we have an example. Jesus was a man of one book; but it was a book worthy to mould such a man, containing as it did those thoughts and histories which were the life-blood of a divinely guided nation; and Jesus brought to that book the sanest, sweetest, strongest mind that ever looked therein. The unity was complete; man and book smote themselves together, mysteriously one, so that deep thinkers have given both the same name, the Word.

What more, then, did He need for His education? How much more do we need? I am not sure but we are in danger of surfeit now. We have so many things to distract us; our literature is swamping us, turning our minds all out-of-doors with so many and so trivial things to think of. This universal diffusion of knowledge of which we are so proud, and on the whole justly, is in some ways a doubtful blessing; it clogs our minds and hearts with such pitiably small things, and with so many things that are not true. Jesus would not let Himself be distracted thus. He kept to the main issues of life, and that one Book was His

sufficient library and literature. Nor did He have to study by rote, as theological students do nowadays, as if it were so much Hebrew grammar. To a life like His, all consecrated to the one thought, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O Lord!" a single reading of divine words was potent for much, for it found Him ready; His loving heart was an understanding heart, a remembering heart. Yes; His resources of culture were great, after all, for they were the resources of an obedient life feeding on the record of a Father's will. And the same transcendent means of education, through the same illumining Spirit, are open to every lowliest man.

II.

And now let us proceed to the study that I spoke of: the consideration of a case where this young carpenter was suddenly brought face to face with what was perhaps the greatest spiritual emergency ever recorded in history. In that emergency He was completely victorious; and His victory throws a very significant light on His habitual study and use of the Bible.

When He was thirty years old He attended a revival meeting held in the open air on the bank of the river Jordan. Here He was baptized. Immediately thereafter, having evidently decided to discontinue working at His trade, He set out to be

a leader and teacher of men. But His way to this mission was, to begin with, a strange one; leading neither to the city, as we should expect, where the leaders of thought and opinion were, nor back to His village home, where among His neighbors He could communicate His new enthusiasm. Obeying a mysterious and holy impulse, He went up from the Jordan, all alone, to the depths of the wilderness, there to take account of mental and spiritual stock, prove His fibre and fitness for the great work that lay before Him. There He remained many days without food, going through strange searchings of heart, and afterward, when He was weak and hungering, having to meet the subtlest and craftiest attacks of Satan, couched in most plausible phrase, and masked in the guise of the divine — "If thou be the Son of God."

A mysterious region, that desert of the Temptation; awful in its sacredness. We cannot explore the depths of it. Boundless principles of life lie revealed in each individual trial, but it is not in our province now to stay for these; nor need we speculate on the form of the tempter or the manner of the temptation. Enough for us that the temptation was to the deepest degree real, that it took hold of the points wherein we all are tempted, and that it was met by practical means that are available to every tempted one.

What means? Dismiss for a moment the trans-

cendent aspect of it, and look at the story in a matter-of-fact way; what method of defence do you find here employed? The citation of scripture; that is, the drawing by memory on the stores of wisdom and precept already learned and in possession. When Satan, taking advantage of His hungering state, plies our Lord with the suggestion to make bread of stones, the quick reply, "It is written," proves that the remedy for the temptation exists, all ready for use, for the mind and heart that will remember and apply it. When in the second temptation Satan, in his turn, quotes scripture, the answer is, "It is written again;" and thus scripture is interpreted, harmonized, made reasonable and conclusive, by scripture. And when finally Satan comes out with the most atrocious, yet most brilliant proposal of all, the young mechanic is not dazzled nor deceived by the offer of worldly dominion, for behind Him is still a sufficing scripture: "Get thee hence, Satan; it is written." Thus at every step Jesus recalls the Bible that He has learned and pondered. He is full of it, His thought and spirit saturated with it; it is His arsenal of weapons, His resource in emergency, as it has been His meditation in life.

Now, doubtless, you will tell me that another endowment for his defence is to be reckoned with here; namely, His baptism with the Holy Spirit.

That is true; but you will remember also that the scriptures do not urge such baptism as miraculous or unique in His case; it was both promised and actually given to those disciples who went forth to engage in the same spiritual battles. What, then, did this add to the efficiency of His defence? Here again, if we are considering an all-men's endowment, let us look at it through all-men's eyes, in the light of common day, not in the dim religious light which so easily makes things unreal to us. That spiritual baptism was a great source of insight and quickening; being, in fact, the presence of the same Comforter whom He afterward described as bringing all things holy to remembrance. By such endowment He was put in possession of His best self; made alert and keen, quick to seize and solve His doubts, making them vassal to the divine ideal of life which was His allegiance; armed also with a pure antipathy against anything base or self-seeking. Now, such a spirit may be enthroned in the heart of man; from above it indeed is, but universally available, to give the control in life, to give the casting vote in emergency. But it does not supersede with us, nor did it with Him, the matter-of-fact way of study, meditation, recollection, comparison, logical association, such as is open to the plainest tasks of life. The Spirit, putting Him in possession of His best self, enabled Him to employ to

fitting purpose what was already stored in mind and ripened in judgment; to use His brain and His reading and His disciplined thought, just as you and I may.

Is it, then, so great a thing to quote scripture? you will say; why, Satan did the same; does not Shakespeare, with this very scene in mind, say the devil can cite scripture to his purpose? We shall have occasion later to see how Satan used Bible truth; what I want you to see here is, that there was in our Lord's use of scripture a readiness, an aptness, a fairness, a largeness, which show not only how much the Bible was to Him, but how also, in correspondent degree, as it takes hold of our lives, it may be a living book to us.

III.

For here in this great wilderness trial the carpenter was dipping into the great treasure-house of ideas in which all His life long he had lived and worked. The histories, the counsels, the songs, the devout aspirations of His people, as embodied in this volume of their literature, had become so ingrained in His mind and heart that when occasion arose He could apply them without hesitation and without error, just as in His carpenter's trade He could without mistake use a chisel for one kind of work and an adze for another. How,

we ask, did His memory strike with such unerring precision for the exactly fitting precept and principle, out of all that scripture record, for the case in hand? It was because the spirit of His life answered to the spirit of the book. There was the text; and every day's experience of His was furnishing the commentary. That forty days' fast of His, just ended, was His contemporary proof of the truth that bread is not man's only food. That long thirty years' apprenticeship to a lowly occupation, that waiting at the workman's bench for the sign that His life's ministry was begun, and the patience that such waiting engendered, had taught Him not to tempt or hurry the Lord His God. That implicit trust in the guiding impulse of the Spirit, a trust that had driven Him here to this stern wilderness, was teaching Him that worship and obedience, though leading sometimes in strange and marvellous ways, were due only to that Father in heaven whose commands, being all-wise and all-loving, could issue only in good. So it was that He was living over those old histories of His people in His own life, vitalizing them in a new experience, learning the costly lessons without sinning the sins. His life was a re-enacted Bible.

Now, here is a thing worth laying to heart. As it was with this young carpenter, so in our degree it may be with us. Our Bible study may be vi-

talized by the fact that we are not only studying, but *making* Bible; for everything that we carry out on Bible principles to a holy issue in our lives is verifying and establishing the truth that Bible principles are fitted to *work* in actual practice. They so adapt themselves to human nature and divine as to make connection and close the circuit in character; or, as scripture itself expresses it, we set to our seal that the Bible is true. Think how much more the scriptures meant to Jesus when in all His searching of them He had the consciousness, "These are they which testify of me." That was true of Him in a transcendent sense; but to us also there comes a great spiritual quickening when in opening the word of God we have the sacred conviction, "That means *me*." Every one of us may thus not only learn the Bible, but build it anew in the structure of Christ-like manhood.

Jesus had lived and meditated in these scripture ideas until they had given color and direction to all His mental and moral workings. You remember how Shakespeare in one of his sonnets complains of the untoward and corrupting tendencies of his actor's art; saying that thereby his nature is almost becoming subdued to what it works in, like the dyer's hand. The poet's life, too familiar with follies and unrealities, was receiving a coloring that his nobler nature loathed.

Jesus had lived for thirty years in the same sphere of tendency that every mechanic has, — the tendency to become narrowed to mere artisanship and become an animated working-tool; but at the end of that period we see that His mind had not become stiffened and fettered by daily drudgery, but had received the coloring of the things invisible and eternal, the great things of God, in which, more truly than in manual labor, He had been working. His communion with spiritual truth had all along ministered to His mental and spiritual emancipation. Our lives are full of such experiences, both for good and evil. We may become in very inspiring degree subdued, or rather disinthralled, to noble things, the large and sane ideas of life, if we habituate ourselves to dwell with them and think in their dialect. But also, alas, we can become subdued to very little things, nay, and to things murky and sordid, so that memory and imagination will refuse to deal with anything else. "Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do, in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery?" It is infinitely deplorable when the chambers of our imagery are hung round only with evil and defiling things; and hardly less so when our mind has taken the dimensions of belittling things. For it is just the things that have taken possession of our imagination, the things that are so shot through

the warp and woof of our life that we cease to think of their influence, — it is such things that color and control our character.

Nor does it stop with imagination. The real test of study is when the subjects of study get into the will, so that when the time of fruitage comes, or when a supreme emergency arises, it may be seen how principle bursts into deed. You see how the Bible principles asserted themselves through Christ here in the wilderness. You can trace something like it in every one's life, — thoughts working themselves through imagination into will and act. You can see it in the play-life of boys, when Robinson Crusoe sets them to exploring desert islands, and Cooper's novels send them on the war-path after Indians. You can deduce it from the lives of your neighbors, when you observe what is the staple of their reading. Some minds are full of the details of the daily papers, — prize-fights and cyclones and murders and railway accidents. The sensations and casualties of the day are their intellectual meat and drink. Some minds are full of the affairs of their neighbors, — all the scandal and gossip that can be smelled out in the community. Some minds think and move in the unreal world of the cheap novelist. Now think what mental furnishing such people have; think how ill-provided they are for the exercise of that calm and large wisdom which

is every man's birthright; think how helpless and forlorn their situation when any searching moral emergency arises. And then think of this young mechanic in the wilderness, exposed to the craftiest attacks of the devil, and overcoming them all. The mystery of all this is not so great as you would think. Jesus had expended on holy and upbuilding themes the life that you and I waste on gossip and the newspapers. He had thought about them so much that memory and association and habit were all interwoven with them; that is the real difference between His mind and ours. What would not result, friends, if, instead of turning our minds all out-of-doors, dissipating them on trivial and characterless, not to say harmful things, we should build them on something that would give them stamina and principle, insight and firmness, when the day of stress and trial comes? It is really a simple matter. It does not so much involve studying more than we study now, as it does transferring the emphasis and interest of our life, learning to love and apply the things of God. When we really love them, when we really lean our whole weight upon them, then they will stick to our memory, and color our deeds.

That simplifies the method of study too; it becomes a very matter-of-fact thing. A great deal is said about Bible study nowadays; and I am sometimes tempted to think in my haste that there

is so much more said *about* it because there is so much less of the real thing. There is great cry — and little wool. Great clamor about clubs and classes and courses, about inductive investigation and historical criticism; great accumulation of apparatus — what Carlyle calls "precautionary and vehiculatory gear" — for setting out on systematic study; and all so formidable that the common and unlearned are scared away; with the result that Bible study is relegated, for the most part, to trained theologians who are paid salaries to know their Bible and use it. Now, here is a book translated into the plainest and sweetest English in the world; a book that tells the history of common people, — fishermen and publicans and mechanics and tent-makers, as well as of kings and prophets; what, then, is to hinder the artisan of to-day from learning how his fellows in old times fared, and profiting by their experience? That is what this carpenter did; and because His mind responded spontaneously to holy things, and leaped to meet them when they were found, He could get enough, perhaps from weekly listening in the synagogue, to stand Him in glorious stead in the most insidious trial to which human being was ever subjected. Or if you wish to come nearer our own times, think of our devout grandfathers and grandmothers, who in spite of the strenuous exactions of their daily labor thumbed their old leather-covered

Bibles to pieces, and became so saintly that the light of Heaven shone in their faces. We search laboriously after the strength of the Puritan character, and ask the secret of it. There is where it lay. It was built on that Book, on day and night assimilation of the truths of God. And that was Bible study. But it was no more formidable to them, no more thought of as a matter of learned research and erudition, than is our minute gathering and retailing of neighborhood or newspaper gossip to us. They loved the Book, and the Book was their upbuilding.

IV.

Another thing that we note in our Lord's quotation of scripture here is that He is making a wise and discriminating use of historic parallels and experiences. The passages that He cites are not catch-words but lessons, — great and inburned deductions of human history. There is about them something large and universal; they are the truths that, once expressed, carry their own evidence.

The lives of us all furnish illustrations of what I mean. The lawyer has his digests of cases and opinions; he will not take a step forward without carefully interrogating what has been done and decided in similar case before. The statesman, the legislator, has his body of precedents. We all have our peculiar lessons and warnings of experience;

we say, "I was bit once by such a business venture; I don't get caught that way again!" Now, our Lord's mind was running on a specific history that was so parallel to this temptation of His in the wilderness that it contained, all worked out beforehand in type, the lessons of this experience, ready to His hand. As He was now in the wilderness forty days, so the Israelites, His own ancestral people, had wandered forty years in a wilderness, had sinned and suffered, had murmured and been chastened; until that period had earned the name of "the day of temptation in the wilderness." You have doubtless noticed that every passage here cited by our Lord was taken from the Book of Deuteronomy, that book wherein the forty years' period is reviewed and its lessons drawn. Thus His finely seeing mind made that piece of history a guiding-post for a time of similar stress and emergency; so that man need not pass that way again and sin the same sins. You see also that in consulting the Bible His mind did not have to wander vaguely and uncertainly over trackless fields of counsel; he was living in the spirit of one great era of His people's life, and that was enough. Nor was He dependent on a catchword here and there, or on some snatch of quotation torn from its occasion and context, like Satan's half-truths; He was moving in such conversance with the large spirit and trend of scrip-

ture as to get its true perspective, its points of emphasis, its predominating note. When tempted to make bread of stones, He simply recalled what was the great object-lesson of the manna, the bread rained on the hungry Israelites from heaven. When tempted to put God to an arbitrary test by casting Himself down from the temple, He recalled how Israel had once tempted God, saying, "Is the Lord among us or no?" and when He thought of that His answer to Satan was ready. When tempted to bow down to Satan's method of securing Satan's acknowledged dominion, He simply fell back on that saving, sobering duty of man: What doth the Lord require of thee but to fear Him, serve Him, cleave to Him, swear by His name? and it was enough; He would seek no shrewder, more brilliant way to success; He would trust to the Godlike in scorn of consequence. So the historic parallel yielded its lesson; and Jesus was victorious where His stiff-necked ancestors had failed.

The spirit in which our Lord approached this portion of the scripture furnishes an instructive contrast to what we are sometimes compelled to see in the so-called higher criticism. The Book of Deuteronomy, as you know, has been a great battle-ground of the critics; some maintaining that its lessons belong to the time purported; others that it was a pious fraud — which, however, they

disguise with a smoother name — perpetrated in the time of King Josiah. And the pity of it is that while they are wrangling over this question, the lessons of the book, its life and power, pass well-nigh unheeded. What difference would such question have made in Christ's study of it? Hardly more, I imagine, than would the idle question whether the book had been written on parchment or papyrus. The guidance that He drew therefrom was a guidance of the heart, of the spirit which maketh alive rather than of the letter which killeth; and so His lesson, well and faithfully learned, would be none the less real and valuable, though the words He cited had never been actually spoken, any more than our lesson of humble self-sacrifice would be any the less valuable though we learned it from the career of Jean Valjean,[1] who never lived at all. The lesson was so true to God's holiness, to His nature, and to the needs of stern experience, that it furnished Him strength and wisdom to overcome. That is what truth means: not the digging-up of some dead and buried fact, but the creation, by means of a vital principle, of a new fact in life. We easily get false ideas of what the Bible stands for, and go off on questions of dead fact, of modes and times, of texts and various readings; when it is the great questions of heart and conduct, of spirit and obe-

[1] The hero of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*.

dience, that are stretching forth hands of appeal to us. Did Prometheus actually steal fire from heaven for the needs of mortals? What matter whether he ever did or not, or whether it came some other way? — *we have the fire.* So also we have the unshakable fact that the Bible is so true to the divine that by it we are redeemed and saved, and so true to the human that it fits every deepest experience and need of our soul. It is truer than fact; it is more valid than documentary evidence, for it has the power of evidencing itself anew. Let us hold ourselves to that power of it, whatever else we let go. That is the great historic parallel that it furnishes every man; a history that lives and multiplies and reduplicates itself until every man has worked the Bible into his character and destiny.

I like to think, too, how this use of a historic experience opens a view into the large, loving, universal heart of Christ. There He was, so identified with mankind in spirit that their history had become as it were His; He took their experiences and wrought them to a holier issue; in their past sufferings He suffered victoriously; over the scene of their blind and staggering journeys He walked in heavenly light. Alone He was here in the desert; but it is no ascetic or misanthrope who thus identifies Himself with the story of His people and His race; it is a heart beat-

ing in unison with theirs as He lives their life over again, and snatches victory from their defeat. May not the same high mission be ours in our degree, as we thrill reponsive to the same heart, and walk in the wisdom that this Book imparts ?

v.

One more thing must not go unnoticed : it is that in our Lord's use of scripture His interpretation and applications are based on broad and sound common sense. When Satan in a subtle piece of special pleading plies Jesus with His own word, "It is written," the quick answer comes, "It is written *again*." The Bible must hang together, one part throwing light on another, one part harmonizing with another, and, above all, every part in harmony with the large Holy Spirit of God. Being the word of the one changeless God, it is a unit, the word of Him who through the eddying ages has transmitted the record of His majestic will and purpose. That dictates that every word of scripture be studied with reference to its occasion. What is written for a time of sunshine may not be so applicable to a time of stress and storm. What is written for a life of trust may not furnish the needed guidance for an hour of doubt. Satan's quotation is true as far as it goes ; but garbled as it is, and forced into

an alien application, it is a half-truth. "He shall give His angels charge over thee," it runs; and a priceless assurance it is. But it is addressed to him who is regarded as dwelling in the secret place of the Most High; while Satan seeks to put our Lord in the vague position of one who does not know whether he dwells there or not, and is trying to find out by testing. It makes a great difference what the connection and occasion of a truth are. Further, whatever is written must be taken with its conditions and context, must be taken whole. "To keep thee in all thy ways," the original text runs; but Satan leaves out that clause. That condition colors the promise very materially. In all thy ways, the legitimate ways of one who is consciously in the secret of God, the ways of love, trust, obedience; not in any fantastic whim that may come into your perverse head. Common sense requires such condition; the spirit of confidence and dependence presupposes that. To expect or demand upholding, whatever ways you choose, whether it be walking in unquestioning communion, or casting yourself rashly down from assurance, is to tempt God. Make His ways and will yours, and His ministers are about you to bear you up, the powers of the universe are for you; how can you expect it otherwise? Remarkable it is to observe how completely, in his only recorded attempt at citation, Satan misses the spirit of

scripture completely; while he twists its words into a subtle suggestion of evil so elusive that it seems the superlative of good. And how Christ's answer clears the poisoned air as with a breeze from the east, — "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." That is what we find when, comparing part with part, and scripture word with its spirit and occasion, we supplement the first color of "It is written" with the sturdy good sense of "It is written again."

This very answer of our Lord is a plea for broad and thoughtful study, for the exercise of consecrated judgment and good sense on the words of God. Interpretations, whether of great things or small, are to test their validity by flowing with the currents of divine revelation. Any little maxim of practical life has roots as deep as the nature of God, just as every man's land, however diminutive in area, extends downward to the centre of the earth. It was this vital connection with eternal principles that Jesus made in every line he quoted; however small its theme, with its context and involvements it became immeasurably great. One is reminded here, by contrast, of that patchwork way of studying and interpreting scripture which arrays all the whosoevers and all the moreovers that can be found, or which finds worlds of suggestiveness in the fact that the word precious occurs just seven times (the sacred number) in the

Epistles of Peter. There is seldom anything large and fertile in such manner of study. It is not founded on the deep things of God, or on the saving good sense of life; and so it may easily become a pious trifling, or a sanctified juggling with words. The carpenter of Nazareth points out the better way; for every page of his Bible is luminous not with mere ingenious combinations of words, but with spirit and life. "These are they," said He, "which testify of me;" and in all His life, of labor and teaching, of joy and success, of hardship and temptation, He was aiming in the sound and practical way to answer to that divine testimony.

So it was that the carpenter used His Bible; just as we use a truth in which our whole life is enlisted. That is very different from using it as an oracle, or a talisman, or a formulary against evil, as people in the Middle Ages used to do; equally different from binding it in Turkey morocco, and keeping it on a marble-topped centre-table, as people sometimes do nowadays. It means, rather, letting the Bible spirit breathe through your lips, your plans, your intercourse, your action, shaping the ideas that are most potent to mould your character; then you will find that it is a Book to make you wise, and that the end of such wisdom is salvation.

I cannot think the artisan class is degenerated

from what it was in the time of Christ. They may still claim as their inalienable birthright the soundness of heart and clear straightforwardness of vision which will enable them to thrive on the Bible, as did their fellow-craftsman of Nazareth. And if they, then every class. Nor can I believe that our churches have degenerated from what the Berean church was; we have the same, nay, a better, opportunity to search the Scriptures daily with sound and wide-awake minds, to see if these things are so. If we are to become subdued to what we work in, like the dyer's hand, let us school heart and mind to leave belittling things, and work in the great ideas of God; and let it be our aim and glory, individuals, churches, associations alike, to walk so congenially, so trustingly, so faithfully, in this sublime scenery of scripture truth that the world seeing us may say, Behold the man, behold the company, whose meat and drink is the will and word of God!

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